

**LORD OF THE DANCE**  
**Holiday Island Presbyterian Church**  
**July 16, 2017**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**At first, the two Scripture readings for today  
seem to have little in common.**

**But let's look a little deeper.**

**In the first reading from Jeremiah 31,  
the Prophet is reminding people of the “everlasting love of  
God.”**

**The people have separated themselves from God -  
- but not from God's love.**

**It was not the best of times -  
- the people had a string of kings who were not the best -  
They had been enslaved by the Assyrians  
and now were under the tyranny of Babylon;  
they were being crushed and oppressed.**

**It was a time without hope . . .  
. . . and yet God loved them enough  
to offer them hope through the prophet Jeremiah.**

**God is promising to restore them . . .  
“I will turn their mourning into gladness;”  
“I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.”**

**And when God brings that to pass,  
God expects the response of the people to be:  
They will “gather on the heights of Zion;”  
“they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord”  
“Then young women will dance and be glad,  
young men and old as well.”**

**God is promising to deliver them from their bondage  
and to set them free.**

**In return, God expects the people to be thankful;  
To be so filled with joy that they dance with joy.**

**Then we turn our attention to the second reading of the morning.  
John records a very important teaching from Jesus.**

**Once again,  
the people have separated themselves from God.  
This time they are under the tyranny of Rome.**

**Their King - Herod - is a mere puppet of Rome  
and the scribes and pharisees are not as Godly and spiritual  
as they could be.  
So the people are suffering once again.**

**God has once again come to His people . . .  
. . . this time as one of us -  
- fully human and fully divine in the person of Jesus.**

**As part of His teaching, Jesus uses the illustration of a vine.  
It is a pretty stark one, at that.**

**In no uncertain terms,  
Jesus says that if we “bear no fruit”  
We will be pruned from the vine - cast out.**

**Now, those are harsh words.  
There is no room for interpretation here.**

**But Jesus follows this stern warning with words of hope:  
“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain  
in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my**

**love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."**

**And what Jesus expects - what God incarnate expects -  
is that our joy will be complete  
and that our joy will cause us to bear much fruit.**

**Both pieces of Scripture are directed  
to people who have strayed from God  
and who are being held in bondage.  
The people of Jeremiah are held in physical bondage;  
The people Jesus addresses are held in the bondage of sin.**

**In both . . . God offers to deliver His people from bondage  
and expects their response to be joyful.**

### **SPIRITUAL JOY:**

**OK, let's get down to business.**

**Have you ever wondered "What makes God happy?"**

**Chances are, none of us has spent much time  
considering how God "feels."**

**Unless, maybe, we are thinking about what makes God "mad."**

**But don't you suppose . . .**

**. . . that if we are made in the image of God  
our feelings mirror the feelings God is capable of?  
Maybe even a reflection of what God feels?**

**We know from Scripture that God has feelings of anger,  
and God is capable of wrath,  
and feelings of sadness.**

**But what do you think  
would make God clap His hands and dance for joy?**

**Here's what I think . . . what I believe.**

**I think there was a great feeling of sadness  
when Adam and Eve disobeyed God  
and had to be removed from the Garden -  
- and the presence of God.**

**I think it took a lot of anger  
for God to flood the earth  
and to curse Pharaoh so badly  
that he released the people of Israel.**

**I'm not sure how God felt with the birth of Jesus,  
but I do know that at Jesus' baptism God said:  
"This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."**

**I don't think God was very happy  
when they nailed Jesus to a cross . . .  
. . . but I am absolutely certain  
that when Jesus uttered His last words from that cross:  
"It is finished."  
That God indeed clapped His hands  
and danced for joy!**

**Not because of the pain and suffering of Jesus -  
- and not that all of that was now over.  
But because NOW we have a way to have our sins forgiven  
and to be reconciled to God!**

**And what do you think God expects from us?  
Joy!**

**Joyful worship!**

**ABSTRACT:**

**I just spent 10 days with our 6 year old -  
- very precocious - granddaughter.**

**As smart as she is,  
she wrestles with abstract thought.  
That's normal for a six year old.**

**But . . . is it normal for a spiritually maturing Christian?**

**When I say we should take great joy  
in our salvation -  
- our deliverance from sin and death;  
do you really grasp the full thought of that?**

**In my younger days,  
when I had a lawn in Oklahoma,  
it just so happens that the lawn needed mowing  
during the hottest months of the year!**

**I used to look forward to completing that task  
because I would jump in my old pickip  
drive over to Rickert's Hawaiian Shaved Ice  
And get a large Pena Colada with cream!**

**Now that's joy you can taste!  
There is nothing abstract about that!**

**You can identify with that  
because you have experenced something similar.  
- A cold slice of watermelon on a very hot day**

- a great hamburger when you're famished
- a slice of hot apple pie with ice cream melting on it for no special reason.

Every once in a while,  
God manages to influence me enough  
that I preach a good sermon -  
- one that causes someone to change their life -  
- to grow closer to God.

There is a quiet sense of great joy in experiencing that -  
- although I would be very hard-pressed to explain it to you.  
Then there is the matter of having our sins completely forgiven.

That should be an occasion for boundless joy!  
There should be singing and dancing  
and shouts of Hallelujah!

I'm afraid our salvation is such an abstract thing  
that we have forgotten how to dance with joy!

Intellectually, we know that Jesus died to set us free;  
we know that God called us to accept that gift in faith,  
we accepted the call,  
we claim the promise of salvation  
we even recite the creeds that remind us.

But is it too abstract for us to grasp?  
Has it become so abstract that it no longer causes us joy?

O God, I hope not!

### **DIRECTORY OF WORSHIP:**

One of the four major divisions  
in the Presbyterian Book of Order is the Directory of Worship.

**Here's what it has to say about Christian Worship:**

**Christian worship joyfully ascribes all praise and honor, glory and power to the triune God. In worship the people of God acknowledge God present in the world and in their lives. As they respond to God's claim and redemptive action in Jesus Christ, believers are transformed and renewed. In worship the faithful offer themselves to God and are equipped for God's service in the world.**

**Did you catch that phrase?**

**"Christian worship joyfully ascribes all praise and honor, glory and power to the triune God."**

### **HOW TO WORSHIP:**

**So exactly how does God expect us to worship?**

**Surely God knows our hearts and our situations  
and God understands that we cannot live in this world  
of great trials and tribulations  
and come through the doors of the church  
week after week  
filled to overflowing with joy?!**

**Surely God understands that sometimes  
it is all we can do to dress ourselves  
and make an appearance?**

**And the answer is "Yes!"  
God fully understands.**

**What God desires is that we do not attempt this on our own!  
God wants to be a part of the burdens that afflict us.  
God invites us to cast our burdens on Him  
so we can catch our spiritual breaths**

**and experience at least a moment of joy.**

**The purpose of worship is to hit the reset button in our lives,  
to re-orient ourselves with God at the very center;  
to reset our spiritual compass  
so that we follow Jesus.**

**We gather to respond to God's gift of salvation -  
- salvation that came through Jesus -  
- at a great cost to God.**

**We gather to be renewed by the Holy Spirit -  
- to have the fresh and fiery winds of the Spirit  
wash through our souls  
and breathe renewed life into us.**

**MY PROMISE TO YOU:**

**Will that happen in every worship service?  
Probably not.**

**We are sinful and fallen creatures -  
- even though we are forgiven and acceptable to God -  
- and we bear the scars of our sins.**

**So, from time to time  
we will limp through a worship service together  
doing our best to honor God.  
May God forgive us if we don't do our best.**

**And on occasion,  
it will seem like there is very little to celebrate . . .  
. . . because the pressures of the world  
have caused us to treat our salvation as an abstract.  
Hopefully, God will understand.**



**I know God will continue to love us.**

**But here's a promise I make to you . . .**

**. . . as long as God continues to inspire me**

**and as long as God allows me to preach from this pulpit**

**I will offer Christ to you!**

**I will do my best to speak for God**

**and to do my best to equip you to do the work**

**God has called us to!**

**And let everything that is said and done here**

**- this day and far into the future - be to the Glory of God!**